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CRS Issue Statement on Terrorism

John Rollins, Coordinator
Specialist in Terrorism and National Security

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Terrorism remains a transnational threat, and understanding the global nature of the numerous organizations and persons wishing to harm U.S. national security interests is central to formulating sound strategic policy and overseeing its effective implementation. The past year has witnessed an increase in terrorist actions by both affiliated but decentralized and non-associated groups of individuals claiming allegiance to terrorist organizations and their underlying ideologies. Many of the past year's terrorist attacks were conducted by individuals or small terrorist cells that received support ranging from resources and training to having minimal connections, if any, with the terrorist groups to which they claim allegiance.

The terrorist threat to U.S. global interests remains a critical issue for the current Administration and 111th Congress. Over the past year, numerous individuals were arrested in the homeland and abroad for conducting attacks and planning terrorism related activities directed at U.S. national security interests. All of the attacks—successful and unsuccessful—were of a transnational dimension and ranged from a lone shooter who may have become radicalized over the Internet to a continued focus of terrorist organizations wishing to use airliners as platforms for destruction.

During its second session, the 111th Congress will likely continue efforts to understand better the nature of terrorism and assess the effectiveness of U.S. and partnering nations' counterterrorism efforts. Success in countering terrorist activities requires the utilization of the full range of available U.S. policy instruments. Congress may wish to assess the Obama Administration's counterterrorism-related policies and programs to ascertain if additional guidance or legislation is required. Programs and policies that the 111th Congress may wish to review include public diplomacy efforts; imposition of sanctions; terrorism financing rules; the nexus between international crime, narcotics and terrorism; and the relationship between domestic and international terrorism activities.

In its authorizing and appropriating legislation, as well as undertaking oversight responsibilities, the second session of the 111th Congress is likely to face a number of specific questions:

- Are current U.S. policy instruments addressing counter-terrorism activities comprehensive, complementary, and consistent? How will the past year's policy and strategy changes affect security prospects for the future? What is the relationship between national security, homeland security, and intelligence policies?
- How should resources be divided among agencies and programs to combat terrorism? Are resources appropriately allocated for U.S. counterterrorism offensive and defensive activities?
- Are adequate resources targeted to foreign assistance and public diplomacy programs designed to address some of the underlying causes of hostility toward the United States?

Issue Team Members

John Rollins, Coordinator
Specialist in Terrorism and National Security
jrollins@crs.loc.gov, 7-5529

Kenneth Katzman
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
kkatzman@crs.loc.gov, 7-7612

Mark E. Manyin
Specialist in Asian Affairs
mmanyin@crs.loc.gov, 7-7653

K. Alan Kronstadt
Specialist in South Asian Affairs
kkronstadt@crs.loc.gov, 7-5415

Bruce Vaughn
Specialist in Asian Affairs
bvaughn@crs.loc.gov, 7-3144

Ted Dagne
Specialist in African Affairs
tdagne@crs.loc.gov, 7-7646

Susan B. Epstein
Specialist in Foreign Policy
sepstein@crs.loc.gov, 7-6678

Carol Migdalovitz
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
cmigdalovitz@crs.loc.gov, 7-2667

Elizabeth B. Bazan
Legislative Attorney
ebazan@crs.loc.gov, 7-7202

Christopher M. Blanchard
Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs
cblanchard@crs.loc.gov, 7-0428

Frank Gottron
Specialist in Science and Technology Policy
fgottron@crs.loc.gov, 7-5854

Andrew Feickert
Specialist in Military Ground Forces
afeickert@crs.loc.gov, 7-7673

Liana Sun Wyler
Analyst in International Crime and Narcotics
lwyler@crs.loc.gov, 7-6177

M. Maureen Murphy
Legislative Attorney
mmurphy@crs.loc.gov, 7-6971

George Mangan
Information Research Specialist
gmangan@crs.loc.gov, 7-5970

Lisa Mages
Information Research Specialist
lmages@crs.loc.gov, 7-7452

Martin A. Weiss
Specialist in International Trade and Finance
mweiss@crs.loc.gov, 7-5407

Lauren Ploch
Analyst in African Affairs
lploch@crs.loc.gov, 7-7640

Mark A. Randol
Specialist in Domestic Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism
mrandol@crs.loc.gov, 7-2393

Edward C. Liu
Legislative Attorney
eliu@crs.loc.gov, 7-9166